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NEWS

Winchester receives update on Davidson Park Stream Restoration project

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Winchester is working with the Mystic River Watershed Association to restore the Abjerona River via Davidson Park. COURTESY PHOTO/MYSTIC RIVER WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

In June 2022, town officials endorsed an ecological restoration p
the Aberjona River through Davidson Park that mimics the origin

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riverine environment. On Dec. 3, the Mystic River Watershed Association (MyRWA) and the town held a Davidson Park Stream Restoration Update meeting about the project.

Plans of one kind or another have been circulating since 2013.

According to the MyRWA project website, "Davidson Park is a public green space that is owned by the Town of Winchester. It is 10 acres and currently has 0.4 miles of public trails. The Aberjona River, a tributary of the Mystic River, flows through the park.

"The park is part of a network of natural spaces and waterways that provide connectivity for wildlife throughout the Upper Mystic watershed," it continues. "Additionally, Davidson Park hosts a portion of Tri-Community Greenway, a multi-use path that connects Winchester, Woburn, and Stoneham."

A satellite image of Davidson Park, showcasing the Aberjona River that runs through it. COURTESY PHOTO/MYSTIC RIVER WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

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Why is the project so important?

"Rivers are always striving toward an equilibrium of flow and sediment," Horsley Witten hydrogeologist Neal Price said during the video-conference forum. "A river needs to accommodate itself in some way. If it's not going to be eroding on one side, it needs to erode on the other side."

It's why rivers meander in windy curves, Price said, adding fast flowing water on one side pushes sediment onto the other side. Altering the course of a river or narrowing it, often done to accommodate development, increases the flow. It doesn't stop sediment from accumulating, it just pushes the issue further down the river. Widening it slows the flow of water and allows sediment to settle.

In the late 1800s, the Aberjona's course was changed to accommodate development of the Brookside Avenue neighborhood on its west side. Faster flowing water led to erosion of its bank, which has been exacerbated on more recent years by losses of porous land.

"The amount of water moving into the system has changed due to development," Price explained. "More water is being driven into the river than 100 years ago. The more impervious cover, in the form of roads and sidewalks, the more water runs off and gets into the river faster."

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What's the plan?

Designs to dredge sediment were downgraded to bank restoration when only $500,000 was made available through grants from the Industri-Plex Natural Resource Damages (NRD) Trustee Council overseeing environmental remediation in Woburn and surrounding communities, "with the stipulation it be a habitat restoration project as oppose park-centric project," Price said.

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"That ended discussion of the dredging and brought us to the river design," he said, adding the idea now is to use logs and wood debris to restore banks."[It] will eventually train the river to go where you want it to go."

Town Engineer Matthew Shuman explained more about the plan.

"Sections of the banks would be stabilized to reduce erosion," Shuman said. "In other areas, woody debris would be placed along the banks to keep normal flows within the channel and restore the natural floodplain. Rock weirs (dams) would be placed in still other sections of the stream channel to improve fish passage. Once a final concept is developed, the town could then apply for final design and construction funding."

There are a number of reports about the site and proposed work, including a September 2020 Final Restoration Plan and Environmental Assessment for the Industri-Plex Superfund Site prepared by the Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration (NRDAR) Trustee Council, the federal Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and a June 2022 Feasibility Study of the Aberjona Restoration at Davidson Park from Horsley Witten.

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The cost and a timetable for the project are still undetermined.

“You can cost estimate all you want, but we have to see how it plays out,” Price said. “We’ll have to see where the bids come in.”

Survey says...

The work should make and keep the area as one people can enjoy. Mystic River Watershed Association Senior Climate Resilience Manager Catherine Pedemonti reported that a 2023 survey which received almost 200 responses indicated 22.1% of respondents use the area for walking, 16.9% to enjoy nature, 11.8% for biking, 11.2% for dog walking, 10.6% for walking with their children, 8.9% to play with their children and 7.7% for bird watching.

“People love walking there and love the wildlife they see,” she said. “People love the nature there, love it’s quiet and feel it’s been neglected and needs work.”

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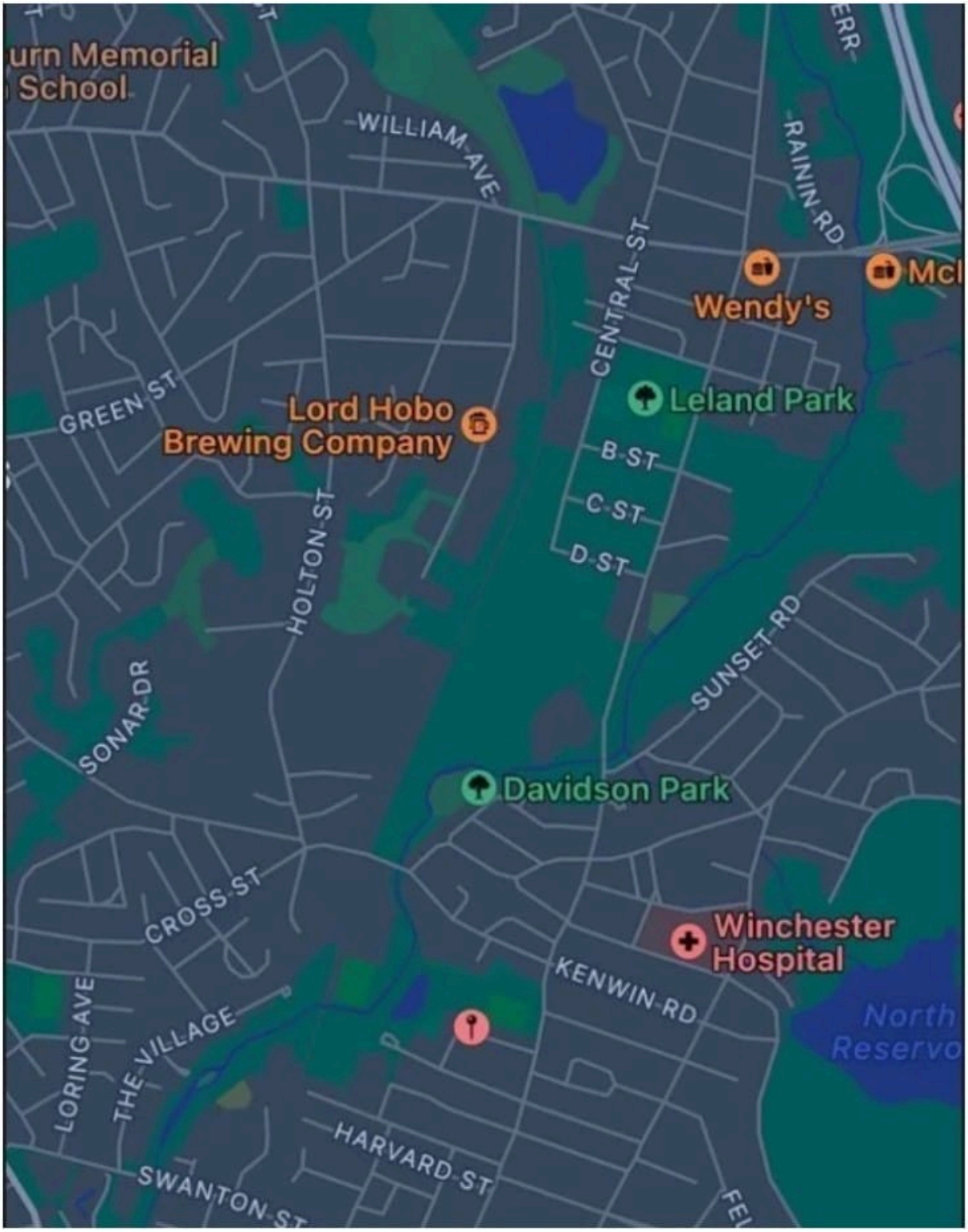

Davidson Park is located within a network of nearby green spaces. COURTESY PHOTO/MYSTIC RIVER WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

She also reported 97.8% of respondents indicated they used the west side path and 67.2% the east side path and 64.3% used the lawn at Davidson Park.

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Questions about the possibility of a bridge over the river drew mixed results. People in favor of a bridge want one for access and like the aesthetics of a bridge, presumably one built to look old-fashioned, but others feel a bridge providing access will lead to inappropriate behavior on the east side.

Neil Zolot has been a freelance journalist more than 40 years. He has worked for newspapers on the North Shore and in the Boston area.

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